

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TOKYO 16777 310546Z
ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 IO-13 EB-08 COME-00 TRSE-00 OES-07 INT-05
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2359
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CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TOKYO 16777

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: JA, KS, PLOS
SUBJECT: TAKESHIMA/TOKTO ISLAND CONTROVERSY -- ANOTHER CHAPTER

SUMMARY: JAPAN-ROK DISPUTE OVER TAKESHIMA/TOKTO ISLAND
BRIEFLY FLARED UP AGAIN DURING PAST WEEK. THOUGH BOTH
GOVERNMENTS HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN MINIMIZING DISPUTE,
INCREASED IMPORTANCE OF TERRITORIAL AND ECONOMIC CLAIMS
IN SEA OF JAPAN IS LIKELY TO ENSURE THAT ISSUE WILL NOT
DISAPPEAR ENTIRELY. END SUMMARY.

1. LONG-STANDING DISPUTE BETWEEN JAPAN AND ROK OVER
SOVEREIGNTY OF TAKESHIMA/TOKTO ISLAND IN SEA OF JAPAN
RE-ERUPTED DURING PAST WEEK IN MINOR FLURRY OF MEDIA AND
DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY. SEOUL PRESS REPORTS THAT KOREAN
FISHERMAN AND FAMILY HAD PERMANENTLY SETTLED ON DISPUTED
ISLAND (UNTIL NOW OCCUPIED ONLY BY ROK COAST GUARD PERSONNEL)
PREDICTABLY GENERATED PUBLIC ASSERTIONS OF JAPANESE
SOVEREIGNTY. WHEN QUERIED IN DIET, FONMIN HATOYAMA
STATED GOJ WOULD STRONGLY PROTEST KOREAN ACTION, ADDING
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THAT ISSUE HELD POTENTIAL FOR SERIOUS EFFECT ON JAPAN-
ROK RELATIONS. IN ADDITION TO PROTESTING FISHERMAN'S
RESIDENCE, FONOFF ALSO PASSED NOTE VERBALE TO ROK EMBASSY --
45TH SUCH PROTEST IN HISTORY OF DISPUTE -- REQUESTING
REMOVAL OF SEVERAL NEW BUILDINGS RECENTLY ERECTED BY
ROK COAST GUARD ON ISLAND.

2. WITHOUT RETREATING ON THEIR OWN CLAIMS, SOUTH KOREANS SUBSEQUENTLY REASSURED JAPANESE IN BOTH SEOUL AND TOKYO THAT FISHERMAN IN QUESTION HAD NOT IN FACT ESTABLISHED PERMANENT RESIDENCE ON TAKESHIMA/TOKTO. WITH THESE DENIALS, JAPANESE PRESS ATTENTION TO ISSUE APPEARS TO HAVE DIMINISHED.

3. THOUGH NOT WITHOUT ITS ELEMENTS OF A TEMPEST IN A TEAPOT, INCIDENT NEVERTHELESS UNDERSCORED HEIGHTENED JAPANESE SENSITIVITY TO OVERALL QUESTION OF ECONOMIC ZONES AND FISHERIES RIGHTS IN SEA OF JAPAN. FONOFF NEE ASIA DEPDIR KAWASHIMA EXPLAINED TO EMBOFF THAT DESPITE GOJ'S DESIRE TO MINIMIZE ANY SUCH BILATERAL FRICTIONS WITH ROK, FONOFF COULD NOT IGNORE ANY CHANGE IN STATUS QUO WHICH MIGHT EVENTUALLY LEAD TO FURTHER REDUCTION OF JAPAN'S ALREADY SHRUNKEN FISHING GROUNDS. THERE WAS, HE NOTED, STRONG SUSPICION WITHIN GOJ THAT ROK HAD BEEN QUIETLY ATTEMPTING TO STRENGTHEN ITS CLAIM TO ISLAND THROUGH DEMONSTRATION OF ISLAND'S ECONOMIC VIABILITY THROUGH PRESENCE OF KOREAN FISHERMEN -- LEGAL POINT

OF SOME IMPORTANCE IN ANY FUTURE EXTENSION OF KOREAN TERRITORIAL OR ECONOMIC ZONE.

4. FOR THEIR PART, LOCAL SOUTH KOREAN OFFICIALS TOOK CONSIDERABLE PAINS TO KEEP DISPUTE ON LOW KEY. ROK FIRST SECRETARY OBSERVED TO EMBOFF THAT PRESENT TIME WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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PARTICULARLY INAUSPICIOUS FOR ANY PUBLIC SQUABBLE BETWEEN TOKYO AND SEOUL. NOT ONLY WAS KOREAN CONTINENTAL SHELF IMPLEMENTING LEGISLATION UNDER DIET CONSIDERATION BUT, HE ADDED, ROK COULD SIMPLY NOT AFFORD PROBLEMS WITH JAPAN AT TIME WHEN US-ROK RELATIONS WERE STRAINED. MANSFIELD

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Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
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